

District Directors' Duties & Responsibilities

Duties of District Board Members

A Conservation District is an entity of state government with statutory powers and responsibilities to carry out a program of soil and water conservation and encourage wise land management. As locally elected public officials, District directors are responsible for the operation and management of the Conservation District. District directors develop policy, which is carried out by employees and resource personnel available to the District. An effective District board uses all the resources available to the District to carry on effective programs. Such resources include: District employee(s); governmental agencies; private groups; individuals; industry; the natural resources of the District; and more.

Listed are basic duties performed by Conservation District directors, either as an individual, or as a member of a District board of directors; and more.

1. Attend and participate in all board meetings and functions.
2. Cooperate with fellow board members in establishing District policies.
3. Participate in setting District priorities in providing technical assistance to landusers.
4. Participate in developing annual plans of work.
5. Participate in developing, publishing, and distributing annual reports.
6. Keep informed on legislation and policies of local, state, and federal government, pertaining to conservation problems. This includes maintaining contacts with local, state, and national public officials to keep them informed of the Districts activities and the District residents' conservation needs.
7. Encourage land users and public entities to become aware of and utilize the services of the District.
8. Cooperate with fellow board members to secure adequate operating funds for the District. Examples: county appropriations; state appropriations; tree seedling retail sales; and so on.
9. Cooperate with fellow board members in establishing sound business practices required for adequate accounting and financial management of the District's fiscal affairs to be in accordance with state law.
10. Cooperate with fellow board members in publishing information articles, newsletters, etc.
11. Know the functions of other agencies that operate in the District.

Act 463, of 1998 as amended, Section 9307 states: "The directors shall designate a chairperson annually." The chairperson is the only office that a Conservation District must have. Nevertheless, Conservation Districts have found it necessary to provide other offices and designations to cover the District workload in a systematic fashion.

In addition to the chair, most Districts have designated the offices of vice-chair, treasurer, and secretary. Districts may wish to combine certain offices (secretary/treasurer) or leave the offices separate. It is the District's prerogative and responsibility to assign the duties of the offices designated by the board. Typically the duties and responsibilities are as follows:

Duties of the Chair:

1. Leads all District meetings in accordance with the District's locally accepted practices.
2. Calls the meeting to order at the appointed time.
3. Presides over all District meetings.
4. Announces the business before the board in its proper order.
5. Preserves order and decorum.
6. When necessary, authenticates by his/her signature all acts, orders, and proceedings of the District.
7. Calls for a vote on all properly presented motions.
8. Votes in case of a tie vote, roll call vote, or vote by ballot.
9. Receives input from other board members, Administrator/Executive Director, NRCS Conservationist and others to assemble topics for the agenda for the next meeting.
10. Acts as, or appoints, a liaison between the board and the Conservation District employees.

Duties of the Vice-Chair:

1. Is familiar with the duties of the chairperson.
2. Presides as chairperson in his/her absence.

Duties of the Secretary:

1. Is familiar with the duties of the chairperson.
2. Presides as chairperson in absence of vice-chairperson and chairperson. (NOTE: A quorum must be present.)
3. Supervises all written reports.
4. Supervises the recording of minutes of all district meetings for their accuracy and compliance with the **Open Meetings Act (1976 PA 267)**. (See Appendix C.)
5. Supervises the preparation of the Annual Report. Attends planning meetings for annual report with the Administrator/Executive Director and NRCS Conservationist and reviews the final draft before publication.

Duties of the Treasurer:

1. Supervises the paying of all bills of the District.
2. Verifies the District's financial standing.
3. Deposits the District funds in compliance with Act 500, P.A. 1978.
4. Presents treasurer's report at board meetings.
5. Signs and verifies all bank statements.
6. Never sign blank checks without the bearer's name and/or dollar amount designated.

Conservation District Regular and Special Meetings - The Open Meetings Act

As an entity of state government, a Conservation District must comply with provisions of Public Act 267 of 1976 (1976 PA 267), the **Open Meetings Act (see Appendix C)**. The Act provides that:

1. All regular and special meetings of a Conservation District board of directors shall be "open to the public and shall be held in a place available to the general public."
2. Public notice of a meeting "shall contain name, address, and phone number of the body and shall be posted at its principal office and other locations considered appropriate by the public body."
3. Notice of schedule of regular meetings must be made within 10 days after the board's first meeting of the calendar year or its fiscal year. An example on the next page is for a Conservation District that has a fiscal year beginning on January 1, 2002 and has a regular meeting scheduled on the first Wednesday of the month.
4. Changes in regular schedule must be posted within three days of the meeting for which the date change was made.

Monthly Meeting Schedule

The Wolverine Conservation District regularly meets at 7:00 p.m. on the first Wednesday of the month. The meeting dates for 2002 are:

January 2	February 6	March 6
April 3	May 1	June 5
July 3	August 7	September 4
October 2	November 6	December 4

The meetings will be held under the provisions of the Open Meetings Act (1976 PA 267) at the Wolverine Conservation District's principal office located at 100 Main Street, County Seat, MI 48888. Phone: 555 1234

5. Special meetings must be posted at least 18 hours in advance.

Consideration should be given to the use of newspaper and radio and television stations as a means of further publicizing board of directors' meetings. Consideration should also be given to holding District board meetings at a place recognized by the general public as a public meeting place; i.e. a county building, public schools, community rooms in banks or other commercial businesses.

The Open Meetings Act does provide provisions for when a public body may meet in a closed session. **A Conservation District may only meet in closed sessions for the following purposes:**

1. To consider the dismissal, suspension, or disciplining of, or to hear complaints or charges brought against, a public officer, employee, staff member, or individual agent, when the named person requests a closed hearing.
2. For strategy and negotiation sessions connected with the negotiation of a collective bargaining agreement when either negotiating party requests a closed hearing.
3. To consider the purchase or lease of real property up to the time an option to purchase or lease that real property is obtained.
4. To consult with its attorney regarding trial or settlement strategy in connection with specific pending litigation, but only when an open meeting would have detrimental financial effect on the litigating or settlement position of the public body.
5. To review the specific contents of an application for employment or appointment to a public office when the candidate requests that the application remain confidential. However, all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting pursuant to this act.

With the acceptance of 1 & 2 listed above, a 2/3 roll call vote is required for the District board to hold a closed session. A separate set of minutes will be kept. The minutes may be destroyed 1 year and 1 day after approval of the minutes of the regular meeting at which the closed session was approved.

Rules for Conducting Conservation District Director Elections

At least 60 days prior to expiration of terms, each District will be notified of expiration of directors' terms. Included with the notice will be copies of Certificate of Election Results and Oath of Office.

At least 60 calendar days prior to the annual meeting, a candidate for Conservation District director must file at the Conservation District office, a petition signed by 5 residents of the District. If the 60th day falls on a weekend, the board will decide which day is the last day petitions may be submitted. To avoid any confusion, the district should clearly state the date and time each petition is due as they are handed out. That due date information should also be written on the petition.

Candidates for district director must declare which of the open terms they are seeking. The length of term for which each candidate declares is to be clearly stated on the cover of the petition circulated by that candidate.

A thorough review of "Procedures Governing Directors' Elections" by the District board and the polling chairman is important. Special emphasis should be placed on the following sections of the procedures.

1. MDA Environmental Stewardship Division is to be advised of the date, time and place at least 30 days before the meeting date.

2. The section “Who May Vote” should be read and discussed at *every Directors’ Election*. It is apparent that many that are eligible fail to vote at annual meetings. *Election of directors is the most important item on the annual meeting agenda.*
3. Attached to the procedures, in the Conservation District Operations Handbook, you will find a ballot form (*all District director elections must be conducted on an at-large basis*), registration blank and the necessary Certificate of Election Results and Oath of Office forms. *These last two forms should be executed immediately after the election.* All elected or appointed directors must execute an Oath of Office for each term elected or appointed.
4. At least three polling officials must sign the Certificate of Election Results.
5. All elections must be conducted as outlined in the Election Section of the Conservation District Operations Handbook.

The Importance of Developing Conservation District Policy

The board is entrusted with the authority to establish policy for the governance of the Conservation District. Board policy establishes the parameters and guidelines for board members, committees, management and staff.

The purposes of District policies are to:

- Inform everyone of board intent, goals and aspirations
- Prevent confusion among board members, staff and the public
- Promote consistency of board action
- Eliminate the need for instant (crisis) policy making
- Reduce criticism of the board and management
- Improve public relations
- Clarify board member, Administrative/Executive, and staff roles
- Give management a clear direction from the board

Policy requires a majority of the board: All policy decisions should be made by majority vote of the board and only at board meetings. Before adopting any policy, all board members should receive a copy of the proposed policy in advance of the meeting at which the vote is to be taken.

Source of policies: Policies may be recommended to the board by committees of the board, individual board members, or by the Administrator/Executive Director. All proposed policies should be researched to ensure that they are legal, and do not contradict already established policy of the District. If approved by the board, policies will be written, coded, dated at time of approval and included in all copies of the board policy manual.

Considerations for all policies: All policies proposed to the board should be evaluated to consider if the proposed policy is:

- Really necessary for good operation of the District?
- Consistent with the District’s mission statement?
- Within the scope of board authority?
- Consistent with local, state and federal law?
- Compatible with other policies of the board?
- Practical?
- Broad enough to cover the subject completely?
- Enforceable?

Distribution of a policy manual: A copy of the board policy manual should at all times be available in the District office for review and inspection by employees and board members. Each board member should be given a revised policy manual. The policy manual should be kept updated by the Administrator/Executive Director.

Amendment or suspension of policy: All policies should be annually reviewed by the board or a committee of the board for accuracy and appropriateness, and recommendations should be made to the board for amendment, addition or elimination. Except as otherwise provided by law, any policy of the board may be suspended, repealed, amended, or waived by a majority vote of the board.

Recommended List Of District Policies

The following, recommended by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, is a list of subjects on which Conservation Districts should adopt policy:

- Structure of the District (chain of command, delegation of activities to Executive Director/Administrator)
- Board Organization (board meeting attendance, authority of board members, committees of the board, public forum during board meetings, board officers)
- Employment/Personnel (make consistent with state and federal laws)
- Conflict of Interest (Board and staff)
- District Finances (financial mgmt., budgeting, signing checks, use of credit card, investment practices, spending authorizations)
- Facilities/Equipment
- Administrative procedures for conduct of board meetings

A Note On Diversity of the Board

Diversity means different things to different people. Within the Conservation Partnership it refers to the concept of inclusiveness affecting both the clientele being served and those that are coordinating and providing the services. It goes beyond notions of race and gender, and embraces all cultures and all people who use, manage and receive the benefits of our natural resources. The members of the Conservation District board should reflect the diversity of the clients that the directors serve in their District. Directors should actively encourage women and minorities to run for District director. This may start by first recruiting individuals to serve on a committee, or by appointing someone to complete a director's term that has been vacated prematurely, to introduce people to the District and its function.